

**Working**  
**your way**  
*through the*  
**child care**  
**maze**

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## **A Parent's Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care**

*The choice of child care for your children should be a positive experience for your family. Always remember you are buying a service that must meet both your needs as a busy parent and the developmental needs of your child.*

*Recent studies have alerted consumers that the quality of child care varies greatly in Colorado and price is not always an indicator of good care. This guide is designed to help you make your way through the child care maze and emerge an educated consumer.*

*Use this guide as you visit three to five child care settings. Choosing child care is an investment in your child's future. Making a hasty decision now may result in child care problems later.*

*You are encouraged to call your child care resource and referral agency for additional free assistance. Each office has trained referral specialists waiting to help you locate local child care services and learn the skills to make a good child care decision.*

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# **What *are my* choices?**

## **In-Home Care**

### **What is it?**

- You hire someone to work in your home to take care of your child.
- You set the hours, responsibilities and compensation for the job.

### **Training / Education**

- Determined by individual nanny agencies; no statewide standard.

### **Pros and Cons**

- Convenient and flexible.
- Expensive.
- You, as the employer, are responsible for background checks and Social Security, income and other applicable taxes.
- When provider is sick, other arrangements have to be made.
- Trained and experienced providers are in short supply.

### **Access**

- Providers can be found through personal networking, advertisements, employment agencies or nanny schools.

### **Regulation**

- Totally unregulated in Colorado.

# **Family Child Care**

## **What is it?**

- An arrangement in which your child is cared for in someone else's (not a relative) home.

## **Training / Education**

- To obtain initial regular license: 12 hours of Department of Human Services approved training plus 6 hours of First Aid and CPR.
- More intensive training is required for infant/toddler care.
- Continuing education: 6 hours of training every year.
- Minimum age = 18.

## **Pros and Cons**

- Usually a small group of multi-aged children.
- Allows you to hire the specific individual who will care for your child.
- May offer flexibility for evening, weekend and respite care.
- Offers a home environment.
- May include a child development or preschool curriculum.
- A single adult is usually alone with the group of children.
- When provider is sick or on vacation, other arrangements have to be made.

## **Access**

- Family child care providers can be found through local child care resource and referral agencies, networking, local family child care associations and newspaper ads.

## **Regulation**

- Regulated by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care.
- A regular license allows for a maximum of six full-time children plus two school-age attending full-day school.
- Caregivers must meet different licensing requirements for "infant/toddler home," "large child care home" or regular license with 3 children under two years old.

# **Child Care Centers and Preschools**

## **What is it?**

- An arrangement where care is provided in a setting similar to a school or kindergarten. (Includes infant and/or toddler nurseries.)
- May be several classrooms.
- Children are usually grouped by age.

## **Training / Education**

- Teacher (Group Leader) and Director; a combination of work experience and college course work.
- All personnel in contact with children must have a minimum of 6 hours per year of training in specified areas.
- Minimum age: aide = 16, teacher = 18.

## **Pros and Cons**

- Child care may be combined with religious or other specific instruction.
- Last minute closures due to provider illness/emergency are unlikely.
- Usually offers a child development or preschool curriculum.
- You are contracting with an organization, not an individual.
- High turnover of staff is common.
- Some children may not adapt well to large group settings.
- Infant/toddler care may not be offered.

## **Access**

- Child care centers and preschools can be found through local child care resource and referral agencies, yellow pages, networking and newspaper ads.

## **Regulation**

- Regulated by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care.
- Regulations define the group size and the adult:child ratio.

# **School Age Child Care**

## **What is it?**

- An arrangement offering care for school-age children before and after school hours, on non-school days during the school year and during the summer.
- May be offered by family child care, child care centers, public and private schools, community recreation programs, YMCAs and others.

## **Training / Education**

- Director: a combination of work experience and college course work.
- Other staff: minimum age 16 and varied work experience.

## **Pros and Cons**

- May be located at the school and offer care during summer and non-school days.
- Many programs transport children to and from school.
- Generally serves children school age through age 12.

## **Access**

- School age child care can be found through local child care resource and referral agencies, yellow pages, networking and newspaper ads.

## **Regulation**

- Regulated by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care.
- Regulations define group size and adult:child ratio.

## Partial Day, Summer, and Non-Traditional Hours of Care

Many families do not need or want full-week or full-day child care. However, locating part-time or “off-hour” care or care for youth with special needs can be challenging. Networking with friends, neighbors and business contacts can be a good beginning. The local child care resource and referral may have a list of other families needing part-time care and may be able to refer you to potential partners. You should begin planning for summer care in early spring. Your local child care resource and referral maintains a list of community programs, and many local newspapers run listings.

## Colorado State Regulations for Staff:Child Ratios in Child Care Centers

*(Please note that the National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends a higher ratio of adults to children than Colorado requires. Studies have shown that group size has the most consistent positive effect on children’s behavior and development. For further information, call the Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children.)*

### Ages of Children

6 weeks to 18 months (infants)  
12 months to 36 months  
24 months to 36 months  
2 2 years to 3 years  
3 years to 4 years  
4 years to 5 years  
5 years and older  
mixed age group 2 to 6 years

### Number of Staff

1 staff member to 5 infants  
1 staff member to 5 toddlers  
1 staff member to 7 toddlers  
1 staff member to 8 children  
1 staff member to 10 children  
1 staff member to 12 children  
1 staff member to 15 children  
1 staff member to 10 children



## **What do the children do all day?**

In both family child care and center care, children should be provided with a balanced variety of activities. A typical day in child care should include:

- nutritious meals and snacks
- large muscle activities, either indoors or outdoors
- rest time
- structured art, science and nutrition activities
- unstructured art activities
- story time
- listening to records and tapes, learning songs, rhymes and finger plays
- building with blocks
- playing make-believe
- free play, where children can choose their own activities

Many child care providers will also be able to include field trips to local interest spots and to the public library.

# ***Steps in making the choice***

After you have gotten 3-5 names of providers from a child care resource and referral agency, friends, newspapers or the yellow pages, call ahead and make an appointment to meet with the provider or the center director and tour the facility. **Observation is the single most important guide to choosing good child care.** Mid-morning is usually a good time to tour. Ask when the children will be napping, outside or otherwise unable to be observed with a teacher or provider.

## **Look**

- Is the provider's license posted and current?
- Does the environment appear safe for children?
- Is the interaction between child and caregiver one of mutual respect and enjoyable for all?
- Do the teachers get down to the children's eye level when talking?
- Are teachers sitting with the children, rather than at desks away from the children?
- Is there sufficient equipment for all children to play with?
- Is there an adult within eyesight of all the children?
- Does the group reflect the community's diversity?
- Is a schedule of daily activities posted or available?
- Are the activities varied to include outdoor playtime and indoor quiet time?
- Are there smoke alarms and an emergency route posted?
- Are menus posted? If children bring their lunch, are there suggestions for lunches?

## **Listen**

- Do the children sound happy and involved?
- Is the sound level appropriate for the number of children in the room, not too loud or too soft?
- Does the caregiver listen closely to each child and use positive language when speaking with the children?

## **Ask**

- Is the facility accredited by one of the national accreditation services?
- What is the training and experience of the caregiver and the center staff?
- Does the training include first aid and CPR?
- Are copies of licensing inspection reports from previous years, including fire and health department reports, available?
- What additional fees are requested of you?
- What communication about your child can you expect from the caregiver on an ongoing basis?
- Does the caregiver inform you of both positive and negative happenings with your child?
- Will the facility provide you with a list of current parents you can contact for references?
- What opportunities are there for parents to participate in the program?
- On what dates is the site closed, i.e., for holidays or staff training?
- Does the caregiver offer alternative care for times when the program is closed?
- Do children go on field trips? If so, who drives and what vehicles are used?
- How does the caregiver deal with behavior problems?
- What happens in case of a medical emergency with your child?
- How does the caregiver handle medicine prescribed for children?
- How much, if any, time do children spend watching television or videos?

## **Count**

- Does the number of children fall within the licensing guidelines?
- Are staff:child ratios met or exceeded?
- Are you comfortable with the group size?
- Will your child work well with this number of children?

## **Approach With Caution If:**

- Parents are limited to visiting hours and are not encouraged to drop in unannounced.
- Teachers are unwilling or unable to tell you about your child's day.
- The children are unsupervised or the posted adult:child ratios are not being met.
- The teachers/providers do not act as if they enjoy their work.
- Staff turnover is ongoing and excessive.
- Health and safety concerns are not attended to, for example, hands are not washed after diapering and before meal times, cleaning supplies are not in locked cabinets, or playground equipment is not safe.
- The license is expired or no license is posted.
- References from current consumers are not available.

## **BEYOND THE BASICS: A Quick Look at Quality**

### **Teachers**

- Staff have formalized training in child growth and development (experience is not enough).
- Caregivers are involved in continuing education programs.
- Caregivers feel committed to the work, don't view it as "babysitting" or "just something to do."

### **Environment**

- Centers have stability in staff.
- Children have a choice of activities and teachers follow the children's lead in directed activities.
- Room set-up is warm and inviting; furniture is child-sized and materials are at child's level.
- Outdoor play space is fenced and has safe surface, play equipment, ample room and sunny and shaded areas.
- Health & safety issues are a priority.
- Supplies are adequate so children may play alone or share as they desire.
- Age appropriate materials are evident and in good repair.
- All children are active and involved in activities.

# ***Who's taking care of my child?***

## **Licensing**

The State of Colorado licenses child care facilities to reduce risks to children in out-of-home care and to verify compliance with basic health and safety standards. This license cannot and does not guarantee quality, but it does ensure that the provider has met specific requirements, including training and a criminal background check. Purchasing child care services from an unlicensed caregiver may increase the risk to your child's health, safety and development.

**All licensed child care programs must make the following information readily available:**

- **Current license**  
“Permanent”: the most common; an ongoing license.  
“Provisional”: issued to new facilities when a minor licensing issue exists.  
“Probationary”: issued when a serious compliance issue exists.
- **Last inspection showing date and findings**  
Colorado operates a “risk-based” inspection policy enabling licensing specialists to focus their attention on helping higher risk facilities come into licensing compliance. Those needing the most attention may be visited every six months or more; those with a history of compliance may be visited every three years. This is not meant to be a rating system of facilities, but rather a method of making the most efficient use of limited resources. Parents need to monitor their child care facility as well and to remain involved in their child's care.
- **The maximum number of children assigned to each room**
- **The adult:child ratio for each room**

## Provider Files

To make an informed decision, you are encouraged to obtain information from the state Division of Child Care:

Division of Child Care  
Colorado Department of Human Services  
1575 Sherman Street, 1st Floor  
Denver, CO 80203  
Phone: (303) 866-5958 or 1-800-799-5876

You can review documents from providers' licensing files either in person or by mail.

1. To review the file in person, call the Division of Child Care at least 72 hours in advance to make an appointment.
2. To review the file by mail, call the Division of Child Care to obtain a request form for the files you want to review. The documents will be sent to you within approximately two weeks. The charge is \$.50 per page.

You will receive:

- past inspection records
- investigation reports if they exist
- copies and dates of any complaints (not just the number of complaints)
- letters of recommendation from other consumers.

# Sample daily activity card

Many child care providers give parents a written report on their child's activities each day. For infants, the report may include diaper changes and feeding times. For older children, the report may include the child's special accomplishments or what the child enjoyed doing that day. These reports help parents monitor their child's care and development.

Below is sample report. If your child care provider is not giving you this kind of information daily, you might encourage her/him to use this form.

## Your Child's Day in "Happy Child" Child Care Center

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Supplies needed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Activities / special accomplishments: \_\_\_\_\_

### Meals:

Breakfast: _____	ATE: very well <input type="checkbox"/>	moderately <input type="checkbox"/>	poorly <input type="checkbox"/>
Lunch: _____	ATE: very well <input type="checkbox"/>	moderately <input type="checkbox"/>	poorly <input type="checkbox"/>
Snack: _____	ATE: very well <input type="checkbox"/>	moderately <input type="checkbox"/>	poorly <input type="checkbox"/>

### Bottles / Cups:

	Time	Amount		(Circle One)
1. _____			Water	Juice <input type="checkbox"/> Milk <input type="checkbox"/> Formula <input type="checkbox"/>
2. _____			Water	Juice <input type="checkbox"/> Milk <input type="checkbox"/> Formula <input type="checkbox"/>
3. _____			Water	Juice <input type="checkbox"/> Milk <input type="checkbox"/> Formula <input type="checkbox"/>
4. _____			Water	Juice <input type="checkbox"/> Milk <input type="checkbox"/> Formula <input type="checkbox"/>
5. _____			Water	Juice <input type="checkbox"/> Milk <input type="checkbox"/> Formula <input type="checkbox"/>
6. _____			Water	Juice <input type="checkbox"/> Milk <input type="checkbox"/> Formula <input type="checkbox"/>

### Sat on Potty / Diaper Change:

	Time	
1. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>
2. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>
3. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>
4. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>
5. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>
6. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>
7. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>
8. _____		Urine/B.M: firm <input type="checkbox"/> soft <input type="checkbox"/> loose <input type="checkbox"/>

### Naps:

	Time Asleep -- Time Awake
1. _____	
2. _____	
3. _____	

### Other Notes, Problems or Questions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

*Credit: Loretta's Little Ones*

## ***After you make your choice***

Licensing monitors compliance with basic standards of health and safety only. Because the state does not monitor child care providers on a daily basis, you as the consumer of services must remain alert to your child's environment each and every day. Make unannounced visits periodically.

If you have any questions about practices or policies you observe in a child care setting, you are encouraged to contact your local child care resource and referral agency.

Formal complaints about a child care provider can be filed with the Division of Child Care. You must give your name and daytime phone number in order to file a complaint, but during the complaint investigation your name will not be revealed to the caregiver.

Good, stable child care may be hard to find. Treating caregivers considerately and acknowledging the value of their work encourages them to stay in business. Keep in mind that the provider is running a small business. Paying on time and honoring the agreed upon schedule for dropping off and picking up your child will go a long way toward maintaining a positive relationship with the caregiver.



# **When *to make* a change**

## **Changing Child Care Providers**

Change will be an inevitable part of your child care experience as your child grows from infancy through the school-age years. Whenever change occurs you will have both practical and emotional issues to handle.

Talk with your child about the change before it happens, but not too far in advance. Let your child know why the change is necessary.

If appropriate, inform the caregiver of the upcoming change. If the parting is on a positive note, plan a get-together with the caregiver, you and your child. Give your child an opportunity to express his feelings about the change.

## **Determining When Change Is Necessary**

Consistency in a child care setting is important to a child's sense of security. However, there are times when the current care situation must be changed for the child's health, safety or developmental reasons. Listen to your child regarding their care setting.

*If you can't answer yes to most or all of the following, a change might be in order:*

**Checklist From a Child's Point of View:**

- ☐ There are lots of fun things to play with.
- ☐ My teacher reads stories to us and there are books for me to look at on my own.
- ☐ I make new friends at child care.
- ☐ My teacher is nice to me.
- ☐ We have good things to eat for snacks and lunch.
- ☐ I have a cozy place to rest when I am tired.
- ☐ My teacher helps me feel better when I am sad.
- ☐ I get to play outside.
- ☐ I learn new things all the time.
- ☐ I feel safe here.
- ☐ I have opportunities to play with others and by myself.

**Checklist From an Adult's Point of View:**

- ☐ My child looks forward to going to child care.
- ☐ My child has friends at child care.
- ☐ I feel welcome at all times.
- ☐ My participation is encouraged.
- ☐ My child talks favorably about the provider.
- ☐ My family's values are reflected in the program.
- ☐ My family's cultural background is honored.
- ☐ Employees both act and speak positively about their work environment.
- ☐ My child does not exhibit an unexplained change in behavior.
- ☐ Cleanliness and hand-washing are evident.

# Employers *and* child care

Many employers have found that assisting families with their child care needs is a financial benefit to the company. Check with your employer's human resources or personnel office to determine what benefits might be available to you. Some employers offer flexible work schedules, flexible work place, the identification of pre-tax dollars allocated to the purchase of child care, enhanced resource and referral services and child care services.

*If your employer has not begun offering assistance and you feel there is a need for assistance, you might find support by:*

- Talking with other employees.
- Finding out what other employees are doing about child care.
- Speaking with your union representative.
- Looking for allies within the company.
- Giving other employees an opportunity to talk about their child care problems.
- Encouraging other employees to let managers know about their child care problems.
- Working through the company newsletter.
- Taking advantage of the suggestion box.
- Making questions about child care a part of company surveys.
- Working with your employer to form an employee/employer task force to study and make recommendations about child care benefit options and dependent care policies.

## **Subsidies**

Many communities have subsidized child care services available on a limited basis. While most of these are through local county departments of human services serving low-wage workers, other programs do exist. Contact your local child care resource and referral agency or United Way for information.

# Provider *checklist*

(Make copies of this checklist to bring with you when you visit a child care provider.)

Center/provider name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ clean
- ☐ good supply of age appropriate toys and materials
- ☐ warm, welcoming atmosphere
- ☐ safe
- ☐ plenty of space indoors and outdoors
- ☐ healthy, nutritious food
- ☐ adults treat the children with respect and consideration
- ☐ adults treat parents with respect and consideration
- ☐ license is current and posted (some providers may also be accredited or pursuing such)
- ☐ caregivers are qualified to care for young children
- ☐ the adult:child ratio is met
- ☐ variety of activities
- ☐ children do not watch television or videos for extended periods of time
- ☐ children seem comfortable and happy
- ☐ positive discipline is used
- ☐ unannounced visits are encouraged

Comments:

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# Child Care resource & referral

**CORRA** The Colorado Office of Resource and Referral Agencies, Inc. (CORRA) coordinates the statewide network of child care resource and referral agencies. In support of parental choice, local resource and referral agencies offer consumer education about all forms of child care services. Trained referral specialists are available to assist you in accessing the type of care you prefer by searching a computerized database of all local licensed child care facilities, with over 50 fields of information on each provider. You can learn about hours of operation, location, costs, ages, environment, subsidies, options for special needs and accreditation. This information is updated and maintained by each agency. Call your local office for free assistance in your child care search or with questions about your child care provider.

Visit [www.corra.org](http://www.corra.org)

- Find Child Care Resource & Referral in your area.
- Search a wide variety of articles and links on child development, advocacy and public policy, work and family, and many other useful topics.
- Search for training and parenting classes in your area.
- What's new in the early childhood community.
- CORRA adds features regularly - come check them out!